

CALIFORNIA COMMUNITY COURTS

Wednesday, October 1, 2003

Introduction

The Administrative Office of the Court's Collaborative Justice Unit held the first in a series of conference calls with California Community Courts. The purpose of this outreach effort is:

- ❑ To have each community court representative share information, including successes and challenges, and describe their respective community court;
- ❑ To discuss how to increase collaboration among similar courts;
- ❑ To condense the content of the conference call discussion and place this information on the collaborative justice website

Orange County Community Court (planning)

Jeannette McSkane, the Director of Management Services for the Orange County Superior Court, reported on the progress and development of Orange County's Community Court Program.

- ❑ Orange County Superior Court is conducting an extensive needs assessment with CCI. They are working on establishing a court "concept." Their biggest challenge is providing funding for a community court.
- ❑ The court is also considering services on a smaller basis through the Santa Ana community centers to deal with issues such as truancy and teen-age pregnancy.

Los Angeles Downtown and Van Nuys Community Courts

Bryan Borys addressed three key components that led to the creation of the Van Nuys Community Court which opened in 2001. He also discussed the important role of the community court resource coordinator, a specialist position that is being utilized by judges outside of community court.

- ❑ Perform a needs assessment
- ❑ Obtain critical funding
- ❑ Conduct numerous meetings with justice partners such as the public defender and the district attorney.

The Van Nuys Community Court attributes the reinstitution of the police bike patrol as an effective intervention in dealing with low-level offenses. A challenging issue for the community court is the tendency for offenses to 'shift' into areas of the city adjacent to the community court catchment area as the court interventions reduce crime within its jurisdictions.

San Diego Community Court

Ms. Tilisha Martin, Community Court Coordinator of the San Diego Downtown Community Court reported on her program. She stated there are three principles fashioned by the Center for Court Innovation (CCI) in New York:

- ❑ ***Hold*** offenders accountable to the community that they negatively impact
- ❑ ***Provide*** pro-active intervention where the court works with the client and assess social services needs
- ❑ ***Encourage*** community involvement in the criminal justice process

The San Diego Downtown Community Court has received funding from the Downtown San Diego Partnership Property Based Improvement District and the San Diego County of Health and Human Services and is maintained on a minimal budget.

- ❑ The San Diego Downtown Community Court, which opened in October of 2002, is a post-filing court.
- ❑ This court serves offenders that commit low level, non-violent misdemeanors in downtown San Diego.
- ❑ If offenders decide to accept a community court offer, they can plead guilty to the charge and receive six months probation where they will be monitored by the community court coordinator.
- ❑ When the probation period is up and the offender has not re-offended and has complied with court orders, the community court coordinator can recommend to the city attorney to dismiss the case.

Promising Practices

- ❑ Ms. Martin of the San Diego Downtown Community Court recommended to Orange County the use of a diverse advisory committee in the planning of their community court. She indicated that one city attorney deals directly with community court cases, thus helping to move cases through the system more efficiently.
- ❑ Mr. Borys also indicated that the Van Nuys Community Court was utilizing a community court stamp to ‘flag’ community court cases and speed case processing.
- ❑ Orange County, San Diego County and Los Angeles County representatives all agreed that the Midtown Manhattan Community Court Model, due to being a “stand alone” court, was not transferable to other jurisdictions due to funding and resource limitations. They all agreed that an integrated community court model would be more realistic.
- ❑ A major challenge for San Diego is the large failure to appear rate. The Van Nuys and San Diego Downtown Community Courts have addressed this issue by partnering with their respective police departments to educate and train the

officers. In an effort to reduce the FTA rate, San Diego created a flyer for police officers to give to offenders to inform them about their court dates and community court. Court appearances need to be close to the time of citation as a means of reducing FTA.

Funding

Ms. Martha Wright of the AOC Grants Unit Staff provided ideas to help secure grants for the community courts. Ms. Wright added that in the 2004 grant year there will be some changes to public grants. The Byrne Grants and the Local Law Enforcement Block Grants will be consolidated into the Justice Assistance Grants. With this consolidation, available grant funds for 2004 could be affected.

- ❑ Focus on the subject matter: Concentrate on specific problems in your community and connect that to funding.
- ❑ Communicate with your local police department: Linking community policing to community courts opens up funding options.
- ❑ Private funding: Contact local businesses and private organizations such as the local Rotary or United Way
- ❑ Health & Wellness: Contact local hospital and health care foundations